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A

HISTORICAL DISCOURSE.

First Congregational Church,

PROVIDENCE, R. I.

CARLTON A. STAPLES,

1878.

F. W. Holland

AN

HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON THE

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ORGANIZATION

OF THE

First Congregational Church

IN PROVIDENCE, R. I.,

AND THE ORDINATION OF JOSIAH COTTON, THE FIRST MINISTER;

Sunday Evening, November 1st, 1878,

BY

CARLTON A. STAPLES.

PROVIDENCE
SIDNEY S. RIDER.
1879.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE following account of the observance of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary is copied from the records of the Society, and printed here as introductory to the historical discourse.

In accordance with arrangements made by a Committee of the Society of which William B. Weeden was Chairman, and Charles H. Sheldon, Secretary, the following services of Commemoration were held.

On Sunday morning, November, 3, 1878, Rev. William Newell, D. D. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, preached from the same text, Isaiah vi.: 8, from which Dr. Appleton, pastor of the Church in Cambridge, one hundred and fifty years ago, preached at the ordination of the first minister. Rev. Dr. Farley of Brooklyn, New York, Rev. Crawford Nightingale of Dorchester, Mass., and the pastor joined in the service. The congregation was large and the services were interesting and impressive.

At the conclusion, the pastor invited all to remain and unite in the observance of the Lord's Supper whose convictions and feelings were in sympathy with this simple memorial rite, stating that nearly a hundred years ago it was voted by the church that the invitation to the communion should include all denominations of Christians. The communion service was conducted by Revs. Dr. Farley of Brooklyn, N. Y., and Dr. T. T. Stone of Bolton, Massachusetts.

In the evening the pastor gave an historical discourse, narrating some of the most striking facts in connection with the planting of the church and with its progress and work during the century and a half of its existence, including brief sketches of the ministers down to the death of Rev. Dr. Hall, and stating its theological position in relation to some of the doctrines which divide the Christian world. Revs. Augustus Woodbury and Alfred Manchester, of the Westminster and Olney Street churches joined in the services. A large congregation was present.

The floral decorations were appropriate and tasteful, and included a band of white flowers across the front of the pulpit, upon which were inscribed in crimson flowers, the dates 1728-1878.

On Monday evening, November 4th, a service was held in the church which consisted of prayer by Rev. Dr. Farley; music, singing and addresses by Rev. Fielder Israel of the First Church in Salem, Rev. Rufus Ellis, D. D. of the First Church in Boston, Rev. C. A. Bartol, D. D. of the West

Church in Boston, Revs. Crawford Nightingale of Dorchester, Mass., Richard Metcalf of Winchester, E. H. Hall of Worcester, J. F. W. Ware of Arlington Street Church, Boston, and E. E. Hale of the South Congregational Church, Boston.

These addresses were full of hearty congratulations to the Society and pleasant reminiscences of its ministers and people.

Besides those who took part in the services, the following clergymen were present by invitation, viz.: Rev. George W. Briggs, D. D. of Cambridge, Rev. Granville Pierce of Medfield, Rev. George F. Clark of Mendon, and Rev. Henry Edes of Dorchester, the son of a former minister. Many of the clergymen present represented churches whose pastors of a hundred and fifty years ago joined in the ordination of Rev. Mr. Cotton.

Letters were received from Rev. Preserved Smith of Greenfield, who was a member of the congregation sixty-five years ago, from F. H. Hedge, D. D. of Cambridge, R. P. Stebbins, D. D. of Newton, Orville Dewey, D. D. of Sheffield, H. W. Bellows, D. D. of New York, S. W. Lothrop, D. D. of Boston, Rev. S. W. Flagg of Bernardston, and Rev. E. M. Stone of this city, with words of good cheer and regrets that they were unable to be present.

At the conclusion of the services in the church, the congregation was invited to repair to the chapel

where refreshments were provided and a season of social intercourse enjoyed.

Thus ended the celebration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the first Congregational Church in Providence, and the ordination of its first minister. The services were of an interesting character and gave much satisfaction to the people.

HISTORICAL ADDRESS.

"They that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."—MALACHI, iii.: 16.

"Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom."—Job, xxxii.: 7.

It is an embarrassing task to pass in review the history of a hundred and fifty years of church life in a single discourse; to gather up and try to make real some of the chief events and personages of this long period, giving a connected idea of what this life has been, presenting the objects and the spirit which have animated it, the influence which it has exerted upon the community, and the fruits of character which it has nurtured and ripened for the garners of heaven.

Let me entreat your patience therefore, if the way seem long, and give me your forbearance, if I seem to wander too freely in the outlying fields of common life. It will be a panorama rather than a finished picture, and if figures are painted which do not strictly belong there, it may relieve a little the tedium of dry detail and cause the unrolling

scene to pass more swiftly, and I hope not less profitably, before you. Surely a century and a half of the life of a church affords much that is worthy of serious consideration. If "multitude of years teach wisdom," we shall find not only events and characters here that excite our interest, but something to quicken our faith in God and man, and make our life more worthy of the divine blessing.

The planting of a church of the Congregational order in the town of Providence, a hundred and fifty years ago, was an object of great interest to the churches of that faith in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Before the year 1720, they had been exploring the land with a view to the commencement of missionary work within this Plantation. Rev. John Greenwood of Rehoboth had visited the place, held services here, and consulted with the authorities in reference to their course should an attempt be made to establish that form of worship. What their answer was, we do not know, but no active opposition was manifested towards the movement, and steps were taken as early as 1720 to gather the few Congregational people of Providence in stated services of worship. That some general organization for religious purposes was formed at that time, seems probable, (although there is no record of it,) since from about this date religious services were held by clergymen of Massachusetts and Connecticut with some degree of regularity, and the ordinance of baptism was administered in the Congregational form to a

number of persons whose names are recorded. In October, 1721, a committee of three clergymen, on behalf of the Massachusetts churches, addressed a letter to the magistrates and principal men of the town of Providence, to ascertain their feeling towards the new movement, and whether, if they should erect a small meeting house here, it would receive their protection. The letter is written in the spirit of extreme diplomatic courtesy, and is full of protestations of regard for the authorities and people of the town, of gratitude for the toleration and kindness already shown their ministers, and of a desire for cordial relations of Christian fellowship. It even goes so far as to suggest that in case they should build a meeting house, the magistrates might wish to build pews therein, and assures them that they would be allowed to do so, and to occupy them whenever they pleased.

At this time there were but two religious societies in the town, viz., the First Baptist, dating from 1639, and the Friends, from 1703 or 1704. It is to be presumed that the inhabitants were mainly connected with those organizations. The entire population, however, could not have exceeded a few hundreds, they probably did not reach two thousand, since it is stated that there were but few dwelling houses in the place, of which two only, were on the west side of the river. At this period Congregationalism was the State religion in Massachusetts and Connecticut, and all the people and prop-

erty were taxed for its maintenance. Baptists, Quakers and Separatists, were compelled to pay their full proportion for the support of the minister, and their property was not unfrequently seized and sold when they refused. When we remember that the founder of our State had been driven out of Massachusetts because he opposed the existing order in State and church, and that numbers of Quakers and Baptists had been imprisoned, fined, tortured, or banished for non-conformity; and when we remember, also, that at the very time this letter was written, asking for toleration from the Baptists and Quakers here, this persecution and oppression were still going on there, we shall appreciate the assurance which dictated it, and the spirit of raillery and sarcasm in which it was answered. It is signed by Peter Thatcher, John Danforth, and Joseph Belcher. After four months, early in 1722, a reply on behalf of the town is returned, written by Jonathan Spreague. It is an exceedingly spicy document, aimed at the intolerant and persecuting spirit of their neighbors, full of biting irony, fortified at every point by scriptural allusions and quotations, but containing not a word in direct answer to their request. However, the ministers continued to come and preach unmolested. Steps were taken in the year 1722, to build a meeting house; funds were contributed by the churches of Massachusetts and Connecticut, on the solicitation of Dr. John Hoyle, of this town, a member of the Society. Without

consulting the wishes of his co-religionists, he proceeded to erect an edifice for their use, near the junction of Broad and High streets, probably as a real estate speculation, since he owned the land around it, and there were but two houses then on the west side of the river. It shows that sharp practices, so prevalent in our day, were not unknown to the people of one hundred and fifty years ago. The location raised such a storm of opposition that he was compelled to stop the work, the house was pulled down, it is said in the night, and he settled with the Society by giving them a deed of one acre of land around the place where it stood. That deed is in the possession of the Society, and bears date July, 1722. Afterwards the ground was used by the Society as a burying lot. A short and crooked street called Hoyle street, probably indicates nearly the site of the meeting house which he began to erect, and of the first burial place, from which the bodies were removed nearly seventy-five years ago.

But the people were not to be defeated in their purpose to secure a house of worship. The lot known as the Old Town House Lot, now occupied by the new Court House, was secured. Capt. Daniel Abbott, the owner, generously donated it to the Society, as it is supposed, and in 1723 the meeting house was finally erected on that spot. It was probably the same structure which had been erected on the west side, re-built there. What its dimensions were, or what its style of architcture, no man

knoweth. The building was occupied until 1794, after having been twice enlarged, when it was sold to the town for municipal uses, and remained standing until 1860, a period of one hundred and thirty-seven years.

Having provided a house of worship, their next concern was to procure a minister. But they were few in numbers and poor in the riches of this world. For five years after the building was erected, they seem to have relied upon such temporary service as the ministers of the neighboring colonies were able to give them, excepting a period of three months, when Rev. Samuel Moody of York, Me., preached to the great satisfaction of the people. Mr. Moody was invited to become their pastor, but his own people refusing to give him up, he was compelled to decline. In the meantime a bell had been procured from London and placed upon the church, which, it is said, was "broken by some unlucky stroke," and returned to be recast. It was finally hung on May 21st, 1728. During the same month a meeting was held "to consider their destitute condition," when the Society by a unanimous vote, made choice of Mr. Josiah Cotton "to take the pastoral care of them." "It was also voted that Capt. Daniel Abbot, the Moderator, and Dr. Jabez Bowen, should repair to him and acquaint him with the vote and pray his answer." An affirmative answer was received in August following, and the twenty-third day of October, 1728, was ap-

pointed for Mr. Cotton's ordination. Allowing eleven days for the difference between old and new style, this date corresponds to November 3rd.

Let us look for a moment at this great event in the history of the Society when it ceased to be a mere congregation of worshippers, ministered to by strangers, and became an organized body under its own leader and teacher. The ordination of a minister and the formation of a church was regarded as an occasion of solemn interest, and the minister and people determined to make it as imposing a ceremony as possible. The little company who had struggled on for eight years, holding up the banner of their faith in a community which looked upon them with suspicion and dislike, resolved now, as the record says, "to show their strength." Accordingly they invited twenty-three churches to assist them in the ordination of Mr. Cotton, viz.: The two Congregational churches at Newport, then the only churches of that order in the State, seven churches in Boston, thirteen in the country of Massachusetts Bay, and one in Connecticut. Eighteen of these were actually in attendance with their ministers and messengers. Mr. Cotton records, evidently with great satisfaction, that "there were supposed to be near forty of the band-men present, besides many candidates for the ministry. The like to which, as to ministers and churches for ye numbers, and possibly too for ye populace, this North America never saw."

The sermon on the occasion was preached by Rev. Nathaniel Appleton of Cambridge, from Isaiah vi.: 8.

"I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send? and who will go for us? Then I said, here am I, send me." The sermon was published, and may be seen in the vast and valuable collection of sermons made by Judge Theron Metcalf, and presented to the library of Brown University. The subject is, "Isaiah's mission considered and applied," which is treated under twenty-four divisions and sub-divisions, ending with an address to the minister and people. He says to the latter: "God in his sovereign Providence has settled you in a very fruitful part of the land, and upon outward accounts it may be said that the lines are fallen to you in a pleasant place, and he has given you a goodly heritage. But you have been unhappy on spiritual accounts, that you have not had such a plentiful enjoyment of the Gospel and the blessed ordinances of it. And more unhappy, you have not been so sensible of the want hereof, nor so concerned as you ought to have been for the enjoyment of such unspeakable privileges. Your case has been pitied by your Christian friends, and many prayers have been going up to God for you, and many endeavors used, that you might not be any longer as sheep without a shepherd." The opening prayer was by Rev. John Cotton, brother of Josiah Cotton; the Charge by Rev. Joseph Baxter of Medfield; the Right Hand of Fellowship by Rev. Thomas White of Bolton, Conn., and the concluding prayer by Rev. Mr. Eells of Scituate. Dr. Prince of the Old South Church in

Boston embodied the church, and the minister pronounced the benediction. After which, as the record says, "all the council resorted to the house and great chamber of Capt. Daniel Abbot, where they had a very sumptuous dinner prepared for them," and, says the minister, "I served the tables." Such was the ordination of the first minister, Josiah Cotton, and the organization of the church to which he was called to minister.

What do we know of this man thus set apart for the work of the ministry in this place a hundred and fifty years ago to-day? He came of a family of consecrated men. He was a native of Sandwich, Mass., the son of Rev. Roland Cotton of that place, and great grandson of Rev. John Cotton the famous teacher of the First Church in Boston, to which he came from the old Cathedral Church of Boston in England. He had graduated at Harvard College six years before, and was at this time twenty-six years of age. It was his first settlement in the ministry, and he seems to have entered into his work with the enthusiasm of an ardent and a noble soul. For nineteen years he remained here, much of the time amid great discouragement and upon a very meagre support, striving to do the work of an humble minister of Christ. Nothing remains of his preaching by which we are able to judge of his ability, but the spirit which he manifested in a time of bitter controversy and strife and the patient fidelity with which he bore up under many hardships, prove him to have

been a not unworthy servant and follower of the great Master.

What were the distinctive principles of the church which was then organized? It is called Congregational, or Presbyterian, as though these terms were synonymous, and it is a singular fact that the name Presbyterian adhered to the organization and even to the meeting house until a comparatively recent period. Dr. Hall says that the first time he came to Providence, asking what church this was of a stranger, he was told "It is the Presbyterian." And yet the church was never in any sense of that order of church government, nor was there a Presbyterian church at that time, probably, in New England. But it has been suggested that it was called Congregational or Presbyterian in contrast and opposition to the Episcopal form of ordination and government, that is, it should be controlled by the people themselves and not by bishops.

The creed adopted on that occasion was *unmistakably* Calvinistic. It recognizes the doctrine of the Trinity, of original sin, of imputed righteousness, and of the eternal punishment of the wicked, though rather by inference and in general terms, than by positive, dogmatic statement; still it makes more prominent the life than the theology. It is not so broad and free as the original churches of the Congregational order in Massachusetts, many of which still retain their first covenants and statements of faith, though they have long since become Unitarian, and

there is nothing in them to which any liberal Christian could seriously object. But this creed was only retained about thirty years, when another was substituted for it which drops every distinctive doctrine of Trinitarianism and Calvinism, leaving out all dogmatic statements and professing simply to believe "in the Christian religion as contained in the Scriptures, and promising to give themselves up to Jehovah, the only portion and happiness, to the Lord Jesus Christ their Mediator and Head, and to the Holy Ghost as Sanctifier, Guide and Comforter." This was adopted in 1761, while the church was without a minister in the presence of a council of the neighboring clergy. It is a brief, comprehensive statement of a Christian purpose, and does not conflict in the least with the broadest thinking.

But I am somewhat in advance of my story. Mr. Cotton's ministry in its last years, fell upon evil times. The great Whitfield revival swept over the country like a devastating whirlwind, creating strife and division in hundreds of churches. It awakened a spirit of fanaticism and folly which defied the counsels of reason, and set at naught the most obvious principles of the Christian faith. In 1742 it began its work in this church. Nearly one-half of the body of communicants and many of the congretion were in sympathy with it. They were no longer satisfied with the preaching of Mr. Cotton. They said "he was not evangelical enough." They

called him an opposer of the work of God's spirit, a hypocrite, "a preacher of damnable good works," and said that "he was leading his people right down to hell." They charged the church with being "Babylon, Egypt and Anti-Christ," and called upon people to "come out from her, be separate, and touch not the unclean thing." It is hard to understand the violence and bitterness with which the people were inflamed, rendering it impossible that they should worship together, dividing families and sundering the closest ties of friendship. The church remonstrated with the unruly brethren and sisters again and again, sent committee after committee to conciliate them and prevent a rupture, but to no purpose. In March, 1743, they formally withdrew and set up their separate worship, as our record says, "under the exhortations of a lay brother brought up to the business of house carpentery." Imagine the offense which this degrading of the ministerial office gave to the church party. They believed in an educated ministry. They looked with deep reverence upon the office, regarding it as the highest and holiest to which man could attain. For an unordained, uneducated man to take it upon himself and that man a carpenter, was an awful sacrilege! And yet the Saviour of mankind was reared as a carpenter, and people said of him that he had no education.

Thus the church was sundered after fifteen years of peaceful and prosperous life. The little company

which had stood together upholding a common faith was now divided almost equally, and bitterly arrayed against each other, because the minister was not sound in the faith of the New Lights and the Church would not encourage a blind, unreasoning enthusiasm in religion. The seceeding party set up their worship on the west side of the river under the leadership of Mr. Joseph Snow, who there planted what is now known as the Beneficent Congregational Church, from which he withdrew in advanced life to set up the Pacific Congregational Church, now known as the Richmond Street Church. Mr. Cotton struggled on for a few years with the little handful adhering to him on a starving salary and amid most disheartening prospects. He finally resigned in July, 1747, removed to Waltham, Mass., where he was settled for a number of years, and again to Sardown, N. H., where he remained settled over a church until his death in 1780, aged seventy-eight years.

I have dwelt somewhat minutely on the first period of our history, because it seems to me to contain the germs out of which our subsequent history has grown. It indicates some of the ruling characteristics of the people—a desire for an educated and orderly ministry, a determination not to be swept away by a storm of religious feeling, and a leaning towards that view of Christianity thought "not evangelical enough," and towards salvation by what was derisively called "damnable good works." These were some of the germs of our history existing in

the period from 1728 to 1747, occupied by the pastorate of Josiah Cotton.

Five years now pass away before another minister is settled, years when the life of the church seems to have hung on a very delicate thread. The neighboring ministers still kept up a friendly interest in their brethren here and gave them such occasional service as they were able to render, and a multitude of candidates for settlement followed one after the other but to no satisfactory end.

We come now to a character in our history who has awakened in me no little interest on account of the noble stand which he took a hundred and thirty years ago in behalf of a rational theology. In the spring of 1752 Rev. John Bass removed to this town with his family from Ashford, Conn. He had just been ejected from the Congregational Church of that place, over which he was settled for nine years, by the Consociation of Windham county for heresy. He became the second minister of this church and served it for six years, when, on account of broken health, he retired from the ministry and became a physician in this town where he lived respected and beloved until his death in October, 1762. A native of Braintree, Mass., a graduate of Harvard College in the class of 1737, he studied divinity, probably under the minister of his native town, and was settled in Ashford in September, 1743. Rev. John Hancock, father of Gov. Hancock, preached his ordination sermon, taking for his subject, "The

danger of an unqualified ministry." It was in the midst of the great disorders consequent upon the Whitfield revival, and the sermon, which was published and is also preserved in Judge Metcalf's collection, is aimed at the wild extravagances of that movement. It was in part a reply to a previous sermon of some minister in Connecticut on "The danger of an unconverted ministry," which Hancock calls "an outrageous sermon." It is difficult to understand the intense interest excited at this time everywhere in New England, and especially in that part of Connecticut, by the discussion of the most abstruse questions of theology, and the fear of departing in the least from a strict and literal construction of the creed. It is related that Rev. Mr. Adams of Canterbury, Conn., was waited upon by a committee of his church and warned against "the danger of preaching up duty and works as terms of life." They told him that they had met with a man in the parish who said that "God doth not require anything of a man but what he can do," which they regarded as a most dangerous belief.

Into this heresy-hunting atmosphere which prevailed everywhere in that region, and the belief that Calvinism is the very essence of Christianity, Mr. Bass came. He was objected to from the first by a strong minority, but on examination by the council he was approved, declaring himself to be "a Calvinsian." Every word however was watched and weighed; not a sermon that seemed to teach the

possibility of salvation by good works but stirred up a storm of ill-natured criticism and harsh rebuke. In the meantime Mr. Bass re-examined the doctrines of the creed and came deliberately to the conclusion that the five points of Calvinism were untenable. Upon this he preached a sermon advising his people to read the Bible for themselves "and not take their religion on second hand." It produced an immediate protest and explosion. He was brought before the Consociation for trial on complaint of the church, where he was confronted with these formidable questions by his accusers: "Sir, don't you believe that every infant brings sin enough into the world with it to damn it eternally?" To which he replied "No." "Don't you believe that some are elected to be damned and cannot be saved?" "No." All will be saved who comply with God's conditions, and all may comply with them if they will. On these two charges he was finally condemned and dismissed from the ministry of the church. A number of the most intelligent and prominent people of Ashford rallied around him and petitioned the General Assembly to allow them to organize a church of their own, on strictly independent and voluntary principles, relieving them at the same time from the ministerial tax; but their request was denied. Mr. Bass removed from the town to Providence, after publishing a narrative of these proceedings leaving in the church book the following as his closing entry: "June 5th, 1751.—I was dismissed from my pastoral

relation to the church and people of Ashford by the Rev. Consociation of the county of Windham, for dissenting from the Calvinistic sense of the Quinquorticular Points, which I ignorantly subscribed to before my ordination; for which, and all my other mistakes, I beg the pardon of Almighty God."

This is the man whom our church settled for its second minister—a pronounced heretic upon the fundamental principles of established orthodoxy—a man ejected from the ministry in Connecticut because he could not believe God will doom an infant to eternal perdition for the sin of Adam, and will save all men who manifest the spirit of obedience to his will. Verily there were men and women in this old church a hundred and thirty years ago who dared to trust the reason and conscience which God had given them, and to believe only those things which seemed to them rational and good. It was after the close of Mr. Bass' ministry that the change in the creed already alluded to was made, dropping out its Calvinistic features and leaving it a simple covenant of Christian purpose and consecration.

It is a singular fact that the next minister, Rev. David S. Rowland, should also have come to this church from Windham county, out of the disturbances caused by the Whitfield revival.

A graduate of Yale College in the class of 1743, a young man of marked ability, energy and decision; sound in theology, yet a determined opponent of the New Lights and their wild hallucinations. He

was settled at Plainfield, Conn., in 1748, where for twelve years he maintained his position against the most stubborn opposition of a majority of the people of the town who had become "Separates," supporting their own minister and standing aloof from the established church. The town refused year after year to vote his salary, and he was compelled to bring action for it, and only recovered it at last after carrying his claim through the Courts. This was done many times and it kept the fires of strife and bitterness fiercely burning in the church and the town. The opposition to Mr. Rowland was purely on the ground of his position as a minister of the establishment. And he seems to have maintained his position from a sheer sense of duty—that somebody had this burden to bear for the cause of Religion. Both parties were finally wearied out, the divided church reunited, and Mr. Rowland came to Providence as the third minister of this church.

It was a fortunate selection. During the twelve years which he remained here there appears to have been a steady growth in numbers if not in pecuniary strength. It was with extreme difficulty however that his salary was raised, and frequent appeals for assistance were made to the churches of other places, even in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Savannah, through Providence merchants visiting those cities. The ministry of Mr. Rowland was on the whole prosperous and peaceful, though it closed under some cloud which is obscurely hinted at but not de-

fined. He was unquestionably an able man and broad in his sympathies, judging by the two or three sermons of his which remain to us, and beloved by his people. But some shadow of dissension crept over the relation and it was dissolved on Sunday the 25th of August, 1774.

It is in Mr. Rowland's ministry that we first begin to recognize the familiar names which have come down to our own day, as prominently connected with the affairs of the church and the history of the town and state. We have seen that Capt. Daniel Abbot and Dr. Jabez Bowen were identified with the organization at the beginning. During the interregnum between Mr. Bass' and Mr. Rowland's ministry in 1761, the name of Samuel Nightingale first appears—"that man of God," as he is called upon the church book at the time of his death. Darius Sessions, afterwards Gov. Sessions, comes in at the same time; also Col. Jabez Bowen, governor likewise; Grindal Rawson, John Reynolds, Joseph Manning and James Green, the beloved physician, for a long period deacon of the church, and Deacon Edward Taylor, who, uniting with the church at the early age of eleven years, before the ministry of Mr. Rowland, remained an honored and active member until his death, under the ministry of Dr. Hall. Thus it is not improbable that Edward Taylor, for whom a beautiful memorial was placed in our new chapel last year by his daughter and grand-daughter, may have seen all the ministers of this church down

to Rev. Mr. Knapp. One life stretching over four score years, thus binds together more than a century of our history. To the period of Mr. Rowland's ministry also, belongs the first appearance of another honored name to whom this church and community are deeply indebted. I mean that of John Howland, who came here in 1770, and who for more than eighty years was a devoted worshipper, and one of the most active members of the Society and church.

Who has not been puzzled to understand an institution which has filled a large place in our history, called "The Congregational Benevolent Society?" It is now a thing of the past, and almost forgotten, but it has an honorable place on our records and it deserves to be remembered for its long career of usefulness. It was nominally a charitable organization formed by the people of the First Congregational Society and confined mainly to its members, but not wholly. It had members also in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York. It was composed exclusively of men. Its object was to accumulate a fund of sufficient magnitude to yield an income which should pay all the expenses of worship. The annual dues payable semi-monthly, amounted to $2.50, and the income was invested as soon as it amounted to fifty or seventy-five dollars. Twice in the month its meetings were held when every member was expected to send or bring his sixpence, and these little contributions were hoarded up and put at interest on mortgages and

other security. It obtained quite a large membership. It used none of its income but continually reinvested it. For many years this process of accumulation went on until the Benevolent Society became a powerful and wealthy corporation. It bought a farm for the use of the minister, extending from Benefit to Prospect streets and embracing nearly twenty acres, and erected a parsonage thereon in 1784, paying all the bills, not excepting one for fifty-four gallons of W. I. rum used by the workmen. It purchased the lot on which this edifice stands in 1794, then extending back to Hope street, and built upon it the elegant house of worship which was burned in 1814; and after its destruction, the Benevolent Society erected this substantial and beautiful church in its place. Finally it took upon itself the payment of the minister's salary and all other expenses of worship, assessing taxes upon the pews for that object in addition to its income from invested funds. Thus originating in a very humble way, it became the sole financial agent of the First Congregational Society, holding its property in trust for the uses of that Society and bearing all its pecuniary burdens. And yet the two remained wholly separate organizations for nearly a hundred years. The Benevolent Society originated under the ministry of Mr. Rowland in 1770, and it was finally merged in the First Congregational Society with all its funds and its chartered rights by an act of the legislature in 1865. I suppose Benevolent

street received its name from the Society, it having been laid out when this lot was bought to make building sites all the way back to Hope street. It is remarkable that it should have had such a long career. Its affairs seem to have been carefully and shrewdly managed. Its accounts were kept with the greatest accuracy and its records show conclusively the active interest of enterprising and sagacious men. But like other institutions in modern life, its benevolence appears to have been confined to its name.

And now came the absorbing agitations which preceded and accompanied the war of the Revolution, when the bonds of society were almost rent asunder, and the interest in the church was merged in the more pressing duties to the state; when patriotism burned brightly on the altars of religion, and the service of God meant to so many minds the service of the country. During this period the people of the Society were widely scattered and worship was only held at irregular intervals. But for the period of nearly a year from May, 1775, Dr. John Lothrop of the Second Church in Boston, driven out of that city by the British occupation, ministered here to the great satisfaction of the people. Before the close of the war however the scattered families began to return and in the winter of 1780 Rev. Enos Hitchcock, then Brigade Chaplain in the army, preached a few Sabbaths, which resulted in his settlement as the fourth minister of the church. His

installation services were held on the first of October, 1783. Dr. Cooper of Brattle Square Church, Boston, preaching the sermon.

We enter here upon a period in our history of substantial and lasting prosperity. Mr. Hitchcock came after five years experience in the ministry as colleague pastor with Rev. Mr. Chipman of Beverly, Mass., and with a wide knowledge of men and of affairs gained by six or seven years experience in the army. He was a man of practical aims and spirit. He loved to mingle in the excitements of business and political life. He saw what was needed to give the Society a solid position of influence in the community, and he had the rare faculty of leading men to see as he saw and do the things which he thought ought to be done. No minister of our church has left a deeper impress upon its history, or accomplished more for the cause of education and of improvement in this community.

His theology was unquestionably of the liberal type then called Arminian. He discouraged the use of the Westminster catechism in the families of his people, and substituted a simple manual of religious instruction and devotion prepared by himself, containing nothing to which any liberal Christian of today would object. He published a work on the Communion of the Lord's Supper which expresses the ideas concerning that rite commonly held by Unitarian people. He made it a standing rule of the church, by the unanimous assent of its members

in 1783, to invite all denominations of Christians without regard to name to unite with them at the common table of the Lord. He is reported to have declared to one of his ministerial brethren while a chaplain in the army that he had examined one after another of those doctrines called orthodox which he had taken for granted, and set them aside so far as not to feel that confidence in them which was then common. And his preaching which was simple, direct, practical and devout, never touched the doctrines of election, of original sin and of imputed righteousness then held essential by the great body of orthodox believers. In short, we may say I think that Dr. Hitchcock's sentiments were clearly in the line of that historic development which produced the Unitarian body. Beginning with the moderate Calvinism of Josiah Cotton, who was "not evangelical enough" to satisfy one-half his people, and going on to the pronounced anti-Calvinism of John Bass, we find the same principles of free grace and salvation by righteousness of character in Enos Hitchcock; and we go on to a broader application of reason in the interpretation of the Scriptures and to Christian faith and doctrine in his successors, Dr. Edes and Dr. Hall.

Under the ministry of Dr. Hitchcock the Society enjoyed a large degree of material and spiritual prosperity.

He cultivated the most friendly relations with the other churches of the town. He asked this church

to rescind its vote of censure and exclusion against the seceeders of forty years before, to which the church unanimously assented and cordial fellowship with the Beneficent Congregational Church under Rev. Mr. Wilson was established and maintained. He took a deep interest in the cause of education, and is regarded as one of the prime movers in founding our system of public schools. He had intimate relations with the distinguished men of the Revolution in all parts of the country, and was an active member of the Society of the Cincinnati and the first Chaplain of the Rhode Island branch. He gave much attention to farming and published a book upon agriculture, besides a work of fiction in two volumes, designed to teach sound principles of domestic education; an active, genial, kind-hearted, many-sided man, who, though not a brilliant thinker or preacher, was a wise instructor in the divine things of righteousness and love, and won many by the purity and sweetness of his character to be followers of Jesus Christ.

The twenty years of Dr. Hitchcock's ministry, extending from 1783 to 1803, witnessed a great improvement in the affairs of the Society. He drew around him a body of strong, influential and enterprising men. They built for him the old parsonage house on Benefit street, now the residence of Mr. George Owen, in 1784, which, he says in his diary, "was raised without hurt to any man"; a statement that is surprising when we read that three gallons of

rum were used on the occasion, with an additional gallon "to raise the rafters." The old church which had been used for more than seventy years was sold and a new one erected on this site and dedicated in August, 1795. The old burying ground was given up and a new one purchased and improved. The affairs of the Society were conducted with more of the system and promptitude of sound business management. It was a period of steady growth in numbers, influence and usefulness.

During his ministry the names of Reynolds, Gladding, Whipple, Sweet, Hunt, Jencks, Metcalf, Dexter, Hamlin, Burrill, Keene, Balch, Richmond, Draper, Dorrance, Gorham, Ames, Weeden, Bullock and Pratt, become familiar on the records—names of families which have been more or less intimately associated with our history from that time down to the present and which in the succeeding generation brought forth a company of men and women whose memory is a precious legacy to any church or state.

But I hasten on to the closing scene. After serving the Society for twenty years, his ministry was closed by death on February 27th, 1803. By careful economy and sagacious management, he accumulated a handsome fortune for that day, a portion of which he gave to the Society in his will "for the support of a learned and pious minister of the Congregational order." He left many bequests to his relatives and friends, not forgetting his colored servant Cæsar, whom he purchased and manumitted

when but a lad of fourteen years. He was generous in his charity towards the poor and suffering and on his death bed directed that fifty dollars be sent to relieve the destitution caused by a great fire in a distant city. He died at the age of fifty-nine and his death was mourned by the town as a public calamity. "Our munificent benefactor" is the inscription upon the simple tablet erected here to his memory. His greatest benefaction was his own bright example of charity, holiness and love. His noblest gift to this church was the influence of his teachings and his life. One here and there of our oldest people still remember him. An engraving of him by William Hamlin is found in some of our homes, and he is one of the figures in Trumbull's great painting of the surrender of Burgoyne in the Rotunda of the Capitol at Washington, a scene which he witnessed. But his real monument is his work and his character, laying the solid foundations of our prosperity and growth.

Two years pass away, and on the 17th of July, 1805, his successor, Rev. Henry Edes of Boston, was ordained and installed as the fifth minister of this church. The names of the assisting clergymen embrace a noble company of men distinguished in the service of literature, education and religion—Rev. William E. Channing, then just entering the ministry; Dr. John Eliot, Rev. James Wilson of this city, Dr. John Lothrop, Dr. Kirkland, Rev. Pitt Clark, Rev. John Pipon, Rev. Thomas Gray and

others. It was an auspicious beginning. The young minister came to a strong, united and prosperous Society. Its theological position, if not very clearly defined, was at least broad and free, and he was permitted to speak his honest thought and give the results of his most advanced study. He was a graduate of Harvard in the class of 1799; a man of fine intellectual and social gifts, of kindling eloquence and fervent devotion. His preaching was attractive to the young for the polish of his style, and his prayers are spoken of by the aged after the lapse of fifty years as wonderfully uplifting and comforting. From the few published addresses of Dr. Edes, his remarks at the laying of the corner stone of this edifice and his sermon at the dedication, October 31st, 1816, portions of which are entered upon our records, it is evident that he was a man of broad views and of a charitable spirit, a master of fine rhetoric and a student of the best literature of his time. For twenty-seven years he remained pastor of the Society, years of theological controversy and partisan strife in New England. He took a decided stand from the first with the liberal party and was outspoken in the advocacy of their views and the expression of his sympathies. And there is no question but the Society and church were united in the support of his position. No internal strife regarding it appears upon our records and but one dissenting voice, that of a lady who asks to be dismissed from the church

on account of the views of the pastor, is heard. They were years of continued activity and growth. The beautiful edifice erected in 1795 was destroyed by fire. But the people rallied at once from the great disaster and began immediately the erection of this more substantial and noble structure, costing the large sum for those days, of fifty thousand dollars, all of which was defrayed by the sale of pews and the contributions of the people.

In 1828, just a hundred years from the formation of this church, a number of persons living upon the west side withdrew and formed the Westminster Society for their greater convenience in worship and to meet the growing wants of that portion of the city. It was a division in the interest of Christian activity and progress and in mutual good will. And in the fifty years which have now elapsed since that event the two churches have uniformly been on terms of the closest intimacy and fellowship, their ministers standing together in their work, and the people walking together in the sympathy and love of one family.

In the last years of Dr. Edes' ministry, our Sunday School was organized, and for fifteen or twenty years it occupied the basement of this edifice, until removed into the chapel built in 1840 for its better accommodation. It has never been a large school, being composed almost exclusively of the children belonging to our own families. But from the beginning to the present day it has been a school

where good and lasting work has been done for the instruction of the young. Its average number has been nearly the same through the whole period of its existence, with a considerable increase during the last year, when it amounted to two hundred and twenty-five with twenty-five teachers. One of its earliest superintendents was the late Judge Thomas of Boston, who while a student of Brown University was connected with this church and who always manifested an affectionate interest in the school which as a young man he had watched over and helped to form. Among the superintendents have been several of our honored clergymen, Rev. William Barry, Dr. Henry A. Miles, Rev. Richard Edes and Rev. Jared M. Heard, besides many prominent laymen, George Larned, Benjamin Cozzens, Joseph F. Pitman, Amos Perry, Daniel A. Taylor and Alfred Stone. The present superintendent is James Shaw, Jr. The school certainly cannot be accused of not cherishing the spirit of patriotism in its pupils. Fifteen young men from one class entered the army during the rebellion, and fifteen from the school gave up their lives for the country.

Before closing this account of Dr. Edes' ministry, let me ask you to look over the list of names which I find on the records of the families then represented here, that you may see how much of enterprise, intelligence, public spirit and private worth were gathered in the congregation; not to boast of it as anything for which we may take credit, but to

note how the history of the city and state are joined indissolubly with that of this religious organization. Here are the Burrills, father and son, Daniel Lyman, Thomas Sessions, William Wilkinson, Richmond Bullock, Samuel W. Green, Benjamin Clifford, Jacob Dunnell, Jabez, William and Pardon Bowen, Carlo and Joshua Mauran, Sullivan Dorr, Joseph Sweet, John R. Balch, Martin Page, Tristam and Thomas Burgess, Samuel Ames, Amherst Everett, Moses Richardson, Matthew Watson, Samuel Nightingale, Samuel W. Bridgham, John and William Hamlin, Nehemiah Draper, Philip Crapo, Josiah Whitaker, Leonard Barnes, Peter Grinnell, John C. Jenckes, Danforth Lyon, John Larcher, Edward Taylor, John Howland, Stephen Tillinghast, John S. and Samuel Dexter, George and Caleb Earle, Joel Metcalf, John H. Green, Charles Holden, Nathaniel Bishop, Ira Winsor, Payton Dana, Samuel Arnold, Edward Sheldon, Job Danforth, Walter Humphrey, George Graves, Andrew and Nathan Waterman, Benjamin Cozzens, Henry Wheaton and Isaac Brown, with a bright galaxy of noble women identified with the intelligence, social refinement and charity of the city. Dr. Edes' ministry closed in June, 1832.

It remains for me to speak briefly of one other minister of the church, the sixth, whose name is in all our thoughts at this moment and whose memory is still fresh and sweet in the places that once knew him, but shall know him in the flesh no more,—Edward Brooks Hall, a descendant, I am told, of the first

minister, Josiah Cotton. He came here from a previous settlement in Northampton, and after six or eight years of experience in his profession, a graduate of Harvard in the class of 1820. He was installed as pastor on the 14th of November, 1832, Dr. Orville Dewey, then of New Bedford, preaching the sermon, the only survivor of those who joined in the services excepting Dr. Farley, who gave the right hand of fellowship. He continued in the ministry here until his death in March, 1866, a period of over thirty-three years, the longest term of service held by any one in the pastorate of the Society.

Do you ask for his monument? Look around you! Nearly all the charities of the city knew his fostering care. Some of the most useful were originated by him. The work of the Ministry at Large was more deeply indebted to his thoughtful care and constant support than to any one besides. Our schools, hospitals and asylums, were objects of his generous interest and executive wisdom. He loved this church with a tender and consecrated affection. He toiled for it with a self-forgetful devotion. Under his instruction and guidance a whole generation of its people grew up to manhood and womanhood. May this church never prove unworthy of the man who for so many years stood in this place to plead for charity, piety and holiness! He was a man who knew no fear but the fear of unfaithfulness to God; a brave, consistent preacher of

righteousness, who spoke his strong word for freedom, temperance, peace, honesty in business and purity in politics,—whether men would hear or forbear.

The years of his ministry were years of earnest work, and generous giving in all the activities of the Society; for schools, colleges and missionary enterprises, and many souls in the light of his teaching, were brought nearer to God here on earth and fitted for his service in the world beyond. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. They rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

All that is mortal of the faithful minister now mingles with its kindred earth on that beautiful spot of our beautiful cemetery called "The Pastor's Rest." There also are the remains of Bass and Hitchcock. But their spirit lives on and on in the influence of their thought, work and character, and in the souls which they trained up for the mansions above.

Of the history of the church since the death of Dr. Hall it is not my purpose to speak. What the future may be depends upon what we are doing now and what we are. No doubt the past has its errors and its sins. The fathers were but frail and fallible men like ourselves. But they have left behind a record of work, character and progress which their sons need not be ashamed to own. Let it be theirs to press on towards nobler achievement in the things of usefulness, wisdom and virtue.

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